

Coalition of Washoe County Associations – Talking points and objectives for group meeting

OBJECTIVES

- 1) Inform members of status of negotiations and stance of County
- 2) Motivate members to get involved in arguing against the direction the BCC is taking
- 3) Provide members with suggestions on how to get involved
- 4) Show County management and the BCC that their bullying negotiation tactics will not be accepted and will likely damage the positive relationship that Associations have had with them in the past
- 5) Change the County stance on negotiations

TALKING POINTS AND DISCUSSION

It is the belief of the Coalition that the County is currently refusing to bargain in good faith with employee associations. Though most, if not all, Associations have attempted to reach out meet the targeted number that the County said that it needed to fill the deficit, the County continues to refuse to accept any of the offers from Associations. Instead, they have presented a “take it or leave it” scenario, in which they threaten to increase the number dramatically if Associations do not agree to serious changes to the benefit packages currently defined in the contract. The County also refuses to give any sort of furloughs for Associations whose members wish them; in short, the County is not really negotiating at all.

- 1) The County is treating its employees as the enemy, even though Associations have worked with the County and given concessions each year they were needed
- 2) The County is conducting bad faith negotiating by essentially blackmailing the Associations to accept their lower offer by using regressive bargaining techniques
- 3) Associations have worked to reach the target numbers sought by the County and have been refused, because the County wants structural changes – most of which will have little to no budgetary impact.
- 4) The County refuses to engage in any sort of give and take for the concessions it is seeking, even those that other jurisdictions and their own consultants have made, such as furloughs.

It appears that the main reason that the County is taking the stance they are taking is political. Certainly, their public statements indicate that they want to maintain services while cutting spending. Of course, services are not being maintained – library closures, reduced office hours, slower response times, run down roads, etc. Many of these cutbacks may cause additional problems and costs, but the BCC has so far refused to look at any means of enhancing revenues to truly maintain services. This includes recommendations from their own consultants, who were paid with public dollars to recommend ways to maintain services.

- 1) Service levels of essential services are being reduced even though the BCC states that its goal is to maintain those levels.
- 2) The Coalition believes that reductions in some services levels may actually cause more cost to the County – such as increased accidents due to reduced plowing of winter roads.
- 3) Management Partners clearly recommended certain revenue generation plans to ensure that services were maintained – including the GST tax and allowing fees in certain Departments to be raised where appropriate – and the BCC has ignored these recommendations in favor of taxing employees.

Apparently, the BCC feels that the public is so angry with public employees that it is safer to tax them alone. Unfortunately, this has led them to implicitly, through their bargaining stance, indicate to the public that their employees are overpaid. Aside from the insult that causes to employees who have taken concessions for three years running to help with budget deficits, there are some real problems with the logic that is being presented. Some of the size of deficit is the responsibility of the BCC and Management. In addition, the County compensation plan targets the median income for the services provided as the *top* of the income scales for County positions. And according to recent analysis of that policy, provided by the Hay Group to the BCC in February of this year, the County is actually coming in just under that target. Even though that is the case, the BCC is asking 2500 employees – about one half of one percent (0.5%) – to shoulder all of the needed additional funds to maintain an adequate level of services that will be provided to the larger population. They only have the courage to tax the employees instead of being honest with the public.

- 1) Much of the concessions being sought are to pay for the Incline Village settlement, which employees had no part in and should not have responsibility for.
- 2) BCC is implicitly saying that County employees are overpaid, even though employees have repeatedly given up concessions to help the County's fiscal issues
- 3) County wage policy and the recent analysis of the policy indicate that contrary to the BCC's implied position, on average, County employees come in just under the median salary levels for like positions in like Counties.
- 4) In essence, the County is attempting to tax 0.5% of the population (its employees) at a very high rate to maintain services that the entire County will use, such as roads, police protection, health services, libraries, immunizations, etc.

Even if the BCC is correct in assuming that its employees are a good political target, they are ignoring something that the public will care deeply about. The approach that the County is taking will cause negative economic impacts in the community. Of course, these are not mentioned by the BCC to the public, even though they are aware of them. In February of this year, they commissioned a study of the economic impact of the County, and it shows that for every dollar spent on wages by the County, the total impact on the local economy is 1.7 dollars. It states that in the downtown area alone, employee expenditures account for 9.3% of the total economic impact of Washoe County in 2009-2010. By placing the entire burden of needed funds on employees alone, the decrease in those expenditures will be quite

large on local businesses. This does not even address the risk of additional foreclosures that could occur amongst employees if their wages are reduced as dramatically as the County is proposing. In the state with the largest foreclosure rate, and in a situation where the biggest impact on revenues is property taxes, this is not just unfair, it is irresponsible. Meanwhile, the BCC is spending a large amount of money on retaining an out of state labor negotiator to ensure that they can force their draconian wage reductions on Washoe County employees. Certainly these actions do not support the County Goal of Regional Prosperity.

- 1) Taxing only the employees and spreading that impact out will harm the local economy and make things worse
- 2) The County's own study shows that for every dollar spent on employment, 1.7 dollars are impact the local economy.
- 3) Large, retroactive pay reductions will reduce employee expenditures and may put some employees at risk of foreclosure, which will exacerbate the economic and revenue picture for the County.

WHAT EMPLOYEES CAN DO

- 1) Take the time to read and understand the points here
 - a. Essential service reductions and needs
 - b. Negative impact that this course will have on economy
 - c. Willingness of Associations to work with County
 - d. Responsibility for some of the deficit issues
- 2) Get out there and talk about these issues with friends, family, and neighbors
- 3) Write letters to the BCC and encourage other people to write letters in support of these points